

## Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

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**Effective Date:**

**Series:** Public Lands

**Part 620:** Wildland Fire Management

**Chapter 1:** General Policy and Procedures

**Originating Office:** Office of Wildland Fire Coordination

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### 620 DM 1

**1.1 Authority.** The statutes cited herein authorize and provide the means for managing wildland fire on lands or threatening lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior (DOI), or lands adjacent thereto.

- A. Protection Act of September 20, 1922 (42 Stat. 857; 16 U.S.C. 594)
- B. McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928 (45 Stat. 221; 16 U.S.C. 487)
- C. Economy Act of June 30, 1932 (47 Stat. 417; 31 U.S.C. 1535)
- D. Taylor Grazing Act of June 28, 1934 (48 Stat. 1269; 43 U.S.C. 315)
- E. O. and C. Act of August 28, 1937 (50 Stat. 875; 43 U.S.C. 1181e)
- F. National Park Service Acts as amended (67 Stat. 495; 16 U.S.C. 1b)
- G. Federal Property and Administrative Service Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 471; et seq.)
- H. Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of May 27, 1955 (69 Stat. 66; 42 U.S.C. 1856a)
- I. National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 as amended (80 Stat. 927; 16 U.S.C. 668dd through 668ee)
- J. Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of December 18, 1971 (85 Stat. 688; 43 U.S.C. 1601)
- K. Disaster Relief Act of May 22, 1974 (88 Stat. 143; 42 U.S.C. 5121)
- L. Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of October 29, 1974 (88 Stat. 1535; 15 U.S.C. 2201)
- M. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (90 Stat. 2743)

- N. Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977 (P.L. 950224, as amended by P.L. 97-258, September 13, 1982 (96 Stat. 1003; 31 U.S.C. 6301 thru 6308)
- O. Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of December 2, 1980 (94 Stat. 2371)
- P. Supplemental Appropriation Act of September 10, 1982 (96 Stat. 837)
- Q. Wildfire Suppression Assistance Act of 1989 (P.L. 100-428, as amended by P.L. 101-11, April 7, 1989)
- R. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (PL 93-638) as amended
- S. National Indian Forest Resources Management Act (P. L. 101-630 November 28, 1990)
- T. Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-413)
- U. Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (P.L. 103-32)
- V. Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, Act of December 3, 2003 (P.L. 108-148)
- W. Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-278) July 22, 2004
- X. National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (PL 105-57)
- Y. Reclamation Act of 1902, as amended

## **1.2 Responsibilities.**

A. The Secretary of the Interior, through the Directors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS) and the Commissioner of Reclamation (BOR) is responsible for wildland fire management activities of the Department (including such activities when contracted for, in whole or in part, with other agencies or Tribes) under the statutes cited in 620 DM 1.1.

B. The Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget (PMB) is responsible for coordination of strategic level inter-bureau, inter-agency, and inter-functional wildland fire policy development and oversight. Principal responsibility for these functions within PMB lies with the Deputy Assistant Secretary - Business Management and Wildland Fire. Advice and recommendations on wildland fire policy and program issues are provided to the Secretary and other policy officials.

C. The Assistant Secretaries for Indian Affairs, Land and Minerals Management, Fish and Wildlife and Parks, and Water and Science are responsible for wildland fire policy

development and oversight within their respective bureaus; and for coordination of inter-bureau and inter-agency policy development with the Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget.

D. The Office of Wildland Fire Coordination (OWFC) is responsible for managing, coordinating and overseeing the Department's wildland fire management programs and policies. They include: smoke management, preparedness, suppression, emergency stabilization and rehabilitation, rural fire assistance, prevention, biomass, hazardous fuels, budget and financial initiatives, and information technology. The OWFC also coordinates with interagency partners including government and non-government groups.

E. The Bureau Directors for BIA, BLM, FWS, NPS and BOR the have responsibility for the implementation of effective wildland fire management programs in conformance with Departmental policy within their respective bureaus.

F. The National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB) is a self-directed group established to resolve wildland fire management issues common to its members. The board seeks to improve coordination and integration of federal fire and aviation programs, while recognizing individual agency missions. The focus is on issues currently impacting wildland fire management and provides a forum for better utilization of fire management resources.

G. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) site houses participating wildland fire partners. These agencies work together to exchange support, protection responsibilities, information, and training, providing an efficient method for protecting lives, property, and natural resources.

(1) The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) is a functional group at NIFC responsible for logistic support, coordination and intelligence reporting for all wildland fire management agencies. NICC is responsible for producing the National Interagency Mobilization Guide, which is used by all wildland fire management agencies as the operational document for moving resources to meet fire management needs; as such, the Guide is an integral part of each bureau's policy/guidance documentation.

(2) The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (MAC Group) is made up of bureau representatives located at NIFC with delegated authority from their respective bureau Directors to determine priorities, allocate or reallocate resources, develop or recommend contingency action plans and issue coordinated situation assessments.

H. National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) is comprised of Federal, Tribal and state representatives from governmental organizations with wildland fire management responsibilities. NWCG is a forum for development of recommended operational policies, guidelines and standards that can be of benefit to participating bureaus. Policies, guidelines or standards, if adopted by a bureau, are implemented through individual bureau directive systems.

I. Each wildland fire management bureau is responsible for taking prompt and effective action in wildland fire management programs and implementing Departmental wildland fire policies.

J. Agency Administrators are responsible for assuring that employees engaged in wildland fire management activities follow Departmental and bureau policy, including NWCG standards, when adopted, and the conditions of employment are consistent with provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

K. Individual employees are responsible for knowing, understanding and practicing safe fire management operations.

### 1.3 **Definitions.** (For the purposes of 620 DM)

A. Agency Administrator. The appropriate level manager having organizational responsibility for management of an administrative unit. May include Director, Office of Trust Responsibility, Regional Director, or Superintendent (BIA); Director, State Director, District Manager or Field Manager (BLM); Director, Regional Director, Complex Manager or Project Leader (FWS); Director, Regional Director, Park Superintendent, or Unit Manager (NPS); or Director-Operations, Regional Director, or Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR).

B. Appropriate Management Response (AMR). Any specific action suitable to meet Fire Management Unit (FMU) objectives. Typically, the AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical operations (from monitoring to intensive management actions). The AMR is developed by using Fire Management Unit strategies and objectives identified in the Fire Management Plan.

C. Ecosystem Sustainability. A concept that promotes the use of natural resources to benefit humans while conserving and wisely managing natural ecosystems for the future.

D. Fire Management Plan. A plan which identifies and integrates all wildland fire management and related activities within the context of approved land/resource management plans. It identifies a program to manage the wildland fire program including the treatment of fuels to maintain fire adapted conditions as well as wildfire, prescribed fire and wildland fire use. The plan is supplemented by operational plans. Fire Management Plans assure that wildland fire management goals and components are coordinated.

E. Fire Use. See: Use of Wildland Fire

F. Initial Action. The actions taken by the first resources to arrive at a wildfire or wildland fire use event. Initial actions may be: size up, patrolling, monitoring, holding action or aggressive initial attack.

G. Initial Attack. A planned response to a wildfire given the wildfire's potential fire behavior. The objective of initial attack is to stop the spread of the fire and put it out at least cost.

- H. Preparedness. Activities that lead to a safe, efficient and cost effective fire management program in support of land and resource management objectives through appropriate planning and coordination.
- I. Prescription. Measurable criteria that define conditions under which a prescribed fire may be ignited, guide selection of appropriate management responses, and indicate other required actions.
- J. Prescribed Fire. Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives.
- K. Wildfire. An unplanned, unwanted wildland fire including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped wildland fire use events, escaped prescribed fire projects, and all other wildland fires where the objective is to put the fire out.
- L. Wildfire Suppression. An appropriate management response to wildfire, escaped wildland fire use or prescribed fire that results in curtailment of fire spread and eliminates all identified threats from the particular fire.
- M. Wildland Fire. Any non-structure fire that occurs in the wildland. Three distinct types of wildland fire have been defined and include wildfire, wildland fire use, and prescribed fire.
- N. Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP). A progressively developed assessment and operational management plan that documents the analysis and describes the appropriate management response for a wildland fire use activity.
- O. Wildland Fire Use. The application of the appropriate management response to naturally-ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in pre-defined designated areas outlined in Fire Management Plans. Operational management is described in the wildland fire implementation plan (WFIP).
- P. Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA). A decision-making process that evaluates alternative wildfire suppression strategies against selected environmental, social, political, and economic criteria and provides a record of those decisions.
- Q. Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetation fuels.

1.4 **Policy**. In 2001, an update of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy was completed and approved by the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. On April 21, 2004 the Secretaries approved the "Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy". This document directs the agencies to work together to develop common language, unified guidance and direction for all agencies and bureaus manuals, handbooks and guidelines to complete final implementation of the policy.

A. Safety: Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.

B. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability: The full range of fire management activities will be used to achieve ecosystem sustainability including its interrelated ecological, economic, and social components.

C. Response to Wildland Fire: Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land, resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, across bureau boundaries. Response to wildland fires is based on ecological, social and legal consequences of actions taken on a wildland fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and, values to be protected, dictate the appropriate response to the fire.

D. Use of Wildland Fire: Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance natural and cultural resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.

E. Rehabilitation and Restoration: Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.

F. Protection Priorities: The protection of human life is the single, overriding suppression priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be done based on the values to be protected, human health and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, they become the highest value to be protected.

G. Wildland Urban Interface: The operational roles of the bureaus as partners in the wildland urban interface are wildland firefighting, hazard fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of Tribal, State, and local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural protection activities under formal Fire Protection Agreements that specify the mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some Federal agencies have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer and may also enter into formal agreements to assist Tribes, State and local governments with full structural protection.)

H. Planning: Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's approved land management plan. Fire management plans must provide for firefighter and public safety, include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.

I. Science: Fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of sound science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors. Information needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of land management plans, fire management plans, and implementation plans.

J. Preparedness: Bureaus will ensure their capability to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land, resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.

K. Suppression: Wildfires will be suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, and be consistent with resource objectives.

L. Prevention: Bureaus will work together and with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.

M. Standardization: Bureaus will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values-to-be-protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.

N. Interagency Cooperation: Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of all partners.

O. Communication and Education: Bureaus will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.

P. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles: Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

Q. Evaluation: Agencies will develop and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency priorities.

## **1.5 Operational Clarification for Consistent Wildland Fire Management Policy Implementation.**

A. Only one management objective will be applied to a wildland fire. Wildland fires will either be managed for resource benefits or suppressed. A wildland fire cannot be managed for both objectives concurrently. If two wildland fires converge, they will be managed as a single wildland fire.

B. Human caused wildfires will be suppressed in every instance and will not be managed for resource benefits.

C. Once a wildland fire has been managed for suppression objectives, it may never be managed for resource benefit objectives.

D. The Appropriate Management Response (AMR) is any specific action suitable to meet Fire Management Unit (FMU) objectives. Typically, the AMR ranges across a spectrum of tactical options (from monitoring to intensive management actions). The AMR is developed by using FMU strategies and objectives identified in the Fire Management Plan.

E. The Wildland Fire Situation Analysis process is used to determine and document the suppression strategy from the full range of responses available for suppression operations. Suppression strategies are designed to meet the policy objectives of suppression.

F. Wildland fire use is the result of a natural event. The Land/Resource Management Plan, or the Fire Management Plan, will identify areas where the strategy of wildland fire use is suitable. The Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is the tool that examines the available response strategies to determine if a fire should be considered for wildland fire use.

G. When a prescribed fire or a fire designated for wildland fire use is no longer achieving the intended resource management objectives and contingency or mitigation actions have failed, the fire will be declared a wildfire. Once a wildfire, it cannot be returned to a prescribed fire or wildland fire use status.

**1.6 Objective.** The objective of the Department of the Interior's fire management activities is a safe, cost-effective fire management program that protects, maintains, and enhances DOI lands.

#### **1.7 Wildland Fire Management Strategies.**

A. Within the framework of land use objectives and plans, overall wildland fire benefits will be maximized and damages minimized giving full consideration to the following within each appropriate management response:

(1) Firefighter and public safety. No wildland fire situation, with the possible exception of threat to human survival, requires firefighters to be placed into a dangerous environment.

(2) Implementing a proactive and effective wildland fire education/prevention/trespass program.



- (3) Prudent expenditure of public funds.
  - (4) Impact on natural and cultural resources and the environment.
  - (5) Integrating cooperative wildland fire management actions with other bureaus or with other qualified wildland fire management organizations.
  - (6) Cost effective, coordinated and prudent suppression activities, including the timely repair of fire suppression activity damage, in compliance with land/resource and fire management planning documents.
  - (7) Timely burned area emergency stabilization (BAER) is performed within acceptable practices consistent with bureau policies and guidelines.
  - (8) Rehabilitation includes repairs or improves land damaged directly by a wildland fire and rehabilitates or establishes healthy, stable, ecosystems in the burned area.
- B. Wildfires, whether on or adjacent to lands administered by the Department, which threaten life, improvements, or are determined to be a threat to natural and cultural resources or improvements under the Department's jurisdiction, will be considered emergencies and their suppression given priority over other Departmental programs.
- C. In all cases where wildland fires could cross boundaries between lands administered by more than one agency or landowner, appropriate cooperative documents will be prepared.
- D. If a wildland fire escapes initial attack or a prescribed fire should exceed prescription and is declared a wildfire, further actions will be evaluated and a management alternative selected through the use of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSa) process.
- E. The agency administrator certifies daily that the selected management actions are appropriate and the necessary resources are available. If management actions become inappropriate or necessary resources are not available, a new appropriate management strategy will be implemented.
- F. Bureaus shall cooperate in the development of interagency preparedness plans to ensure timely recognition of approaching critical wildland fire situations; to establish processes for analyzing situations and establishing priorities, and for implementing appropriate management responses to these situations.
- G. When smoke from wildland fire management activities has the potential to impact human health or safety, agency administrators will coordinate with State and local agencies to determine the level of risk and appropriate risk mitigation strategies. When prescribed burns are planned, agency administrators will review and mitigate smoke hazards using appropriate smoke management techniques.

H. Bureaus must incorporate wildland urban interface considerations into all agreements, operating plans, and land/resource and fire management plans, to ensure that all interface areas are covered and state and local responsibilities are apportioned appropriately.

I. Bureaus will enforce rules and regulations concerning the unauthorized ignition of a wildfire, and actively investigate violations.

J. Wildland fire education and prevention is an integral part of the total wildland fire management program. Bureaus will develop and participate in interagency wildland fire education and prevention programs.

K. All personnel engaged in wildland fire activities will meet the minimum qualification requirements, which are equal to or exceed those recommended by the NWCG.

L. Bureaus will standardize wildland fire applications and develop easily accessible common systems (e.g., Fire Report System, National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS), Fire Program Analysis (FPA)).

**1.8 Wildland Fire Assistance.** Bureaus will cooperate with other international, Federal, Tribal, State, or local organizations. Neighbors can be assisted if they fall under an agreement with a local organization. Formal agreements shall be made under the auspices of the appropriate authority cited in paragraph 1.1 of this chapter. These agreements may take the form of Interagency Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, Cooperative Agreements, mutual aid agreements, compacts, or contracts. Bureaus may provide assistance, when authorized by the President, to any State and local government for management of a wildland fire officially declared as a disaster. There will be no interbureau billing or reimbursement between the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, or Bureau of Indian Affairs for personnel and other resources involved in wildland fire emergencies. For preparedness, fuels management, and prescribed fire projects bureaus may choose to bill one another by mutual agreement.

**1.9 Research.** The NFAEB will consolidate wildland fire research needs funded through the Department of the Interior and Other Related Agencies Appropriations Act, and other acts funding the Departmental fire management program. Bureaus may request under the McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928, as amended, basic and applied research in wildland fire management from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture